

# OLAQ

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Volume 21 , Number 2 *Oregon Libraries: Ideas at Work* | Pages 25 - 27

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9-9-2015

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Muller, K., Sharwell, E., & Chase, S. (2015). Meeting Patrons Where They Are: Experimenting With Shelf Arrangement, Community Service Points, and Non-traditional Collections. *OLA Quarterly*, 21(2), 25-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1799>

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*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374 | <http://commons.pacificu.edu/olaq>

# Meeting Patrons Where They Are:

## Experimenting With Shelf Arrangement, Community Service Points, and Non-traditional Collections

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In recent months, Hillsboro Public Library has been reevaluating many of our services to patrons, looking for ways to better connect with readers in the library and throughout the community. This article talks about some of the ideas we have implemented as we move toward more non-traditional services and create more opportunities to take our services outside of our buildings.

### Picture Books Collection

When little kids come into the library to look for books, they don't ask for particular authors the way adults do. What they want are books about dinosaurs, animals, trains, or princesses. And what their parents want are simple books for toddlers, or stories about starting preschool or becoming an older sibling. Yet our standard arrangement of picture books by author can frustrate and overwhelm the children and their parents. In our quest to make things easy for our patrons, and in support of our early literacy goals which seek to create new readers, we decided that we should reorganize our picture books from a standard author arrangement to the way kids actually look for them: by subject.

After a trip to the Seattle area to take a look at their collection, we are modeling our reorganization on King County Library System's picture books by subject, with a few additions and changes. We chose 17 subject categories, each with its own colored label. The label on the book will only contain the name of the genre, though our matching shelf labels will also include a representative picture.

But why stop with picture books? We also have an easy nonfiction collection and a DVD collection which include the same subject matter geared to the same audience. Wouldn't it be great if preschoolers could find ALL the material on dogs rather than just the fiction books? We think so. That's why we're also going to add those collections into our picture book subject areas.

Because there are a lot of picture books on some of our subjects, and because we still would like to take advantage of the subject arrangement provided by the Dewey Decimal System, our new labels will not cover up the existing author or call number labels that are currently on our materials. Instead they will be placed above them, so that library staff and patrons can still find the exact book they want quickly by call number. Arrangement within each subject will be fiction by author, then nonfiction by Dewey, then DVD.

We plan to process one subject at a time, starting with dinosaurs (because dinosaurs are awesome!) We have built record sets in our ILS to which we can add ideas for other subjects as books are evaluated, so we don't have to evaluate an item twice. After catalogers edit item records to add the new subject prefix, they will be placed on carts for pages to apply the new labels before the books head back to the shelf to begin their new, more discoverable life.

### Exploring New Methods of Access

We shouldn't just think of improving access for patrons in house, but also in our communities. We know convenience and access is paramount for patrons, but that most of us cannot possibly expand hours or locations in order to meet the expressed demand of our communities for access to our resources.

In Hillsboro, we decided to explore improving access through two means: first, by installing a library vending machine in downtown Hillsboro, and second, through adding a traveling "library living room" for outreach and community events.



Our vending machine, named the Book-O-Mat to harken back to the automat days, is located on the plaza of Hillsboro's City Hall, the Civic Center. In addition to serving patrons in downtown Hillsboro, the Book-O-Mat provides easy access to library materials—including the ability to browse and download from our ebook collections—for city staff, as well as for the large number of staff and visitors to the Washington County offices located across the street. The Book-O-Mat, manufactured by MK Solutions, will provide access to approximately 400 books and DVDs, all of which will be new and popular materials.

Our mobile library, called the Library on the Loose, is a fold-out cart with shelves for items, plus benches for patrons to use while browsing or reading. The Library on the Loose is made by the UNI Project (<http://www.theuniproject.org/>) and can hold up to 250 items, although for most events we will take far fewer than that. We plan to take the Library on the Loose to community celebrations, school sites, parks, and many other places. The collection will be specifically selected to match each event that we are attending. People who visit the Library on the Loose can check out the items, get a library card, and talk to library staff. We want it to be a full service library wherever we take it.

We're not alone in these experiments, of course: book vending machines like the ones we are used to for candy and snacks have been popular in Canada, including in the capital of Ottawa and in Toronto, where the library there is (Deschamps, 2015). Larger kiosk machines, like our Book-O-Mat, have been popular in Asia and in Europe for a long time. Books promoted via bicycle caught the attention of many when rolled out at The Seattle Public Library in 2013 ("Books on Bikes," 2015). The Free Library of Philadelphia offers a digital collection in one of their main commuter train stations, where users can download books directly via QR code and access the library's podcast collection (Michelle S., 2013). Neighbors to the north, the King County Library System outside Seattle and the Fort Vancouver Regional Library, both offer unmanned library locations, accessed by library card, at the Redmond Ridge (About the Redmond Ridge Library Express, 2014) location and the Yacolt (Yacolt, n.d.) location, respectively.

There's much to be said for exploring new ways to bring the library to patrons.

### Expansion and Branding of Library of Things

The first line of our mission statement reads: "The mission of the Hillsboro Public Library is to provide materials and services to help community residents of all ages and cultural backgrounds to meet their informational, educational, professional, and recreational needs." In our view, it makes a lot of sense to provide our community with all manner of items to help them learn new skills and discover their world.

In last winter's issue of OLAQ, we described our first forays into moving beyond traditional books and media, into collecting items which fostered creativity, connection, and lifelong learning in our community. We started with LEGO, Arduino kits, and bakeware. In the spring, we started working on the next phase of what has become our Library of Things. We did some research, developed some policies, and created a brand for our new collections.


At the beginning of the summer we launched a kitchen gadget collection, including items such as Popsicle molds, tortilla presses, deep fryers, canning kits, cherry pitters, food dehydrators, and ice cream makers. We visited the local farmer's market to talk with the community about the possibilities of using and preserving the produce they were buying with the help of the library's new collection. People were very excited about our new Things—particularly the ice cream maker, which as of this writing has 41 people on the holds list.



Because of the local high-tech industry we also have a lot of interest in new technology, so we started circulating Finch robots, OzoBots, littleBits, MaKey MaKey Kits, Intel Galileo microcontrollers, and snap circuit kits as well. So far, those seem to be even more popular than the kitchen gadgets, and programming surrounding this collection is well-attended.

Summer is also a great time to learn a new sport or to explore the outdoors. To that end we started an outdoor recreation collection: croquet, horseshoe, and badminton sets; beach kits of sand toys, kites and beach balls; and kits for discovering birds and insects.

In the fall we are hoping to expand the Library of Things even further, to include hand and power tools.

Response to these new ideas has been extremely positive in the Hillsboro community. We hear from patrons over and over again that they are surprised by what we have and where we now offer services. The Library of Things is seeing increased usage as word spreads about it, and we hope to continue growing our presence outside our buildings by creating partnerships with local organizations and taking the Library on the Loose to wherever people are gathered. 

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